

The United States Animal Identification Plan Version 4.1 executive summary states, "Protecting American animal agriculture by safeguarding animal health is vital to the well-being of all U. S. citizens." It goes on to say, "Essential to achieving this goal is an efficient and effective animal identification program." The Farm Service Agency (FSA) has been successfully involved with agricultural producers of the United States for many years and, as such, FSA and its employees have close ties to the local producers. Working in concert with the Animal and Plant Inspection Service (APHIS), Homeland Security and private companies, FSA could ensure a private-state-federal partnership is realized and workable. This alliance could create an efficient, secure, inexpensive animal identification program (without creating a completely new tracking system) by drawing from the following strengths:

Ø Location. FSA has accessible locations in nearly every county and parish in the U.S.

Ø Implementing programs. FSA has had success in implementing livestock programs in times of disaster and/or economic instability. FSA has proven time and again it can implement programs of National scope quickly and accurately, which will be critical for national security, public confidence and restoration of foreign trade.

Ø Cost factor. FSA already has the capability to provide this service with little additional cost, other alternatives could involve considerable start up costs. In addition, a new agency or field offices would not need to be established to deal with animal identification at the local level.

Ø GIS/GPS capabilities. Each FSA office is now completing Geographic Information System (GIS) Common Land Unit (CLU) layers of all land in the county. We have the capability to take our current database of livestock producers and put them on a CLU layer and reference every livestock operation in the nation. Each Premise ID can be assigned a point, area and producer information that will remain until that operation is changed or moved. This layer can be attributed with the type of operation and number of livestock, "Just like a highly erodible flag or wetland flag" that FSA already administers, a producer can report commercial livestock is located on a tract of land and FSA can flag that tract as "yes-livestock". APHIS can pick this flag up from the GIS data base and compare it with producers in the many voluntary identification systems which track livestock numbers. The database can readily utilize any assigned unique Premise ID. For example, if APHIS decides to utilize the USDA number allocator it can be used in the data table of the FSA CLU.

Ø Keeping an accurate database. FSA has 90 to 95% of all producers already in their database. We have developed a national secure internet based database that allows us to verify producer's records instantly. Once an animal has been identified and linked to a producer's ID, it can be attached to the Premise ID and a permanent record of the animal's birthplace would be readily available.

Ø Quick response capabilities. An example of FSA's quick response capabilities; a problem animal shows up at a slaughter plant to be identified, the ID would be read and immediately searched for in the national ID database either public or private. The system will provide a link between the ID tag and a Premise ID. Within, a matter of minutes the county office could be contacted. Based on experimental trials the county database can be searched and the premise located within 45 seconds. If a quarantine of a specified area is required, we have the capability to draw any size radius around that farm and ID all other livestock operations within the quarantine area immediately. Producers can then be notified immediately and APHIS, state and/or local authorities can get about their work without delay. A locally maintained data layer of premise ID's will greatly enhance the ability of APHIS to meet the 48 hour trace back requirements.

Ø Privacy assurances. The Congress is considering amending the Animal Health Protection Act requiring the establishment of an electronic nationwide livestock identification system, to prevent the unauthorized release of information collected under the system, to promote an objective review of Department of Agriculture responses to livestock disease outbreaks, and for other purposes. Included in the bill are the following provisions: (f) Release of Animal Identification Numbering Information-(1) Freedom of Information Act- Information obtained through the livestock identification system is exempt from disclosure under Section 552 of Title 5, United States Code. (A) May not be released ;(B) shall not be considered information in the public domain; and (C) shall be considered commercial information that is privileged and confidential.

In conclusion, an animal identification plan is inevitable and is needed to ensure the food security of this Country. The only question is how the government can provide the most cost effective, secure, and reliable method of

supplying timely information. A “database” tied to a “Premises ID” will certainly be the foundation of any system. FSA already has that database and the local presence to make implementation and administration as convenient and efficient as possible for producers, private industry and partner state and federal agencies. As always, FSA stands ready to serve U.S. livestock producers, and if called upon will work with Animal and Plant Inspection Service, Homeland Security, State Veterinarians private companies and anyone as a willing partner on this important security and safety endeavor.